# 6.3
# Producing Reports

On a regular basis, a successful stream volunteer monitoring program should produce reports that summarize key findings to volunteers; data users such as state water quality agencies, and local planning boards; and/or the general public, including the media. State water quality agencies will require detailed reports, whereas shorter and less technical summaries are more appropriate for the general public. All reports should be subjected to the review process prescribed by your Quality Assurance Project Plan.

## Professional Report

In a report designed for water quality or planning professionals, you should go into detail about:

- The purpose of the study
- Who conducted it
- How it was funded
- The methods used
- The quality control measures taken
- Your interpretation of the results
- Your conclusions and recommendations
- Further questions that have arisen as a result of the study.

Graphics, tables and maps may be fairly sophisticated. Be sure to include the raw data in an appendix and note any problems encountered.

## Lay Report

A report for the general public should be short and direct. It is very important to write in a non-technical style and to include definitions for terms and concepts that may be unfamiliar to the lay person. Simple charts, summary tables, and maps with accompanying explanations can be especially useful. This type of report should include a brief description of the program, the purpose of the monitoring, an explanation of the parameters that were monitored, the location of sample sites, a summary of the results, and any recommendations that may have been made.

Both types of reports should acknowledge the volunteers and the sources of funding.

## Publicizing the Report

Develop a strategy for distributing and publicizing your report before it is completed. Be sure the planning committee is confident about the data and comfortable with the statements and conclusions that have been included in the document. When the report is released to the public, you will need to be prepared to respond to questions regarding the data and your interpretation of that data.

Some ideas for distributing the results and informing the public include the following:

- *Mailing the report.* If you have access to a mailing list of people who are interested in your stream, mail the report with a cover letter that summarizes the major findings of the study. The cover letter should be brief and enticing so that the recipient will be curious enough to read the report. If you want people to take some kind of action, such as supporting the expenditure of public funds to upgrade a sewage treatment plant, you may want to ask for their support in the cover letter. If you do not have an extensive mailing list, perhaps other organizations that share your goals would be willing to supply you with their list. Be sure to also send the report to the newspapers, radio and television stations, and state and federal agencies.

- *Speaking tour.* You may also want to develop an oral presentation (with slides, overheads, etc.) that could be offered to groups such as the Chamber of Commerce, Rotary clubs, conservation organizations, schools, and government entities. Your presentation could even be video-taped for distribution to a wider audience.

- *Public meetings.* You may want to schedule a series of public meetings that highlight the program and its findings and recommendations. At the meetings, distribute the report, answer questions and tell your audience how they can get involved. These meetings can also help you recruit more volunteers.

  Be sure to schedule the meetings at times when people are more likely to attend (i.e., weekday evenings, weekend days) and avoid periods when people are normally busy or on vacation. Invite the media and publicize the meetings in newspaper calendars, send press releases to newspapers, radio and television stations and other organizations, and ask volunteers to distribute flyers at grocery stores, city hall, etc.

- *News releases.* Writing and distributing a news release is a cost effective means of informing the public about the results and accomplishments of your program. Develop a mailing list of newspapers, radio and television stations, and organizations that solicit articles for publication. Send the news release to volunteers and others who are interested in publicizing the monitoring program.

  The first page of your news release should feature the sponsoring organization's name and logo to clearly designate the source of the news. Include a headline, the date, a contact name and number, and whether the story is for release immediately or a later date. The first paragraph should begin with a dateline (the city of origin for the event or story described in the release) and include the essentials: who, what, where, when, and why and a synopsis of the most important elements of the story. The second paragraph should contain the second most important facts, the third paragraph the third most important points and so on. Editors tend to chop off the last paragraphs if short on space. Therefore, be sure to state your major points early in the press release.

- *News conferences.* If your report contains some real news, or if it has led to a significant event, (e.g., the mayor or city council has recognized the value of the report and issued a statement of support) hold a news conference. Timing and location are important. Early in the day, but after 10 a.m. is good (most camera crews start their workday at 9 a.m.) because it allows plenty of time to edit the tape before the noon news broadcast. You may want to consider timing the conference so that a TV station could broadcast it live at the noon or the evening news show. For the conference, choose a place that has good visuals, such as location along the river or water body that you have been studying, at your headquarters where volunteers can be shown working in the background or at a recognition gathering for volunteers.

- *Other publicity.* Be creative in getting your report and message out. Try writing op-ed articles for local or statewide papers, writing letters to the editor, producing radio feeds (a

recording of the group's leader played over the phone to a radio station), issuing media advisories, and even advertising in publications. For more help on getting your message across, consult the references cited below.

## References and Further Reading

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